**Essential Points for the Student Writer**

All writers need to bear in mind both the purpose of their writing and for whom they are writing. As a student writer your purpose is, in most cases, to **display your understanding** to your reader, who is your marker. Thus, when tackling an assignment, you need to ask yourself what knowledge and understanding it has been designed to assess. Then ask yourself how well you have succeeded in displaying that knowledge.

Does your paper cover all the main aspects and in sufficient depth?

Is the content accurate and relevant?

The breadth, depth, accuracy and relevance of content should be the core elements you consider when writing assignments.

**How many drafts are necessary?**

Academic writing is a process that involves drafting and re-drafting to craft your paper into its final form.

There is no set rule about how many drafts are necessary to perfect a piece of writing. Some students may think that they need to write only one draft of an assignment, correct the errors they find, and turn that in for a grade. More realistically, students need to work through at least several drafts to come up with the best possible finished product.

**What is involved in editing?**

Reviewing and re-working a text to bring it to its final form entails several processes.

**Editing for structure** involves checking that information and ideas are organised in a coherent way that the reader can follow.

**Editing for style** relates to ensuring that the writing is clear and that it has the appropriate 'tone', i.e. that it 'sounds' right.

**Proofreading** is the process of finding and correcting errors in spelling and punctuation, and checking for grammatical correctness.

When undertaking these processes, writers should view their work from the perspective of the reader. It can be difficult to view your work objectively, but it is the only way you can ensure your message is getting across to the reader in the clearest and most effective way.

**Editing for structure - essays**

When editing an essay for structure, use the following checklist as a guide.

**Introduction:** Does the introduction present or define the topic, state your purpose clearly and present your line of argument?

**Body:** Does the body of the essay develop your argument?

Are the paragraphs ordered logically?

Are there smooth transitions between paragraphs through the use of transitional words/sentences?

Does each paragraph have a topic sentence that clearly states the main idea of the paragraph?

Is each paragraph adequately developed and supported with details, examples and explanations?

**Conclusion:** Does the conclusion sum up your argument with reference to the essay question?

Is the introduction and conclusion linked?

Have you ensured that no new material is introduced here?

**References:**

Have you used the recommended referencing style for your assignment?

Are all references acknowledged?

**Editing for style**

Editing for style involves examining the clarity and tone of a piece of writing. As a student writer, your purpose is to demonstrate the clarity and depth of your thinking. Clear writing indicates clear thinking.

You should also adopt the appropriate academic tone. You will become familiar with the accepted style in your field by reading a variety of texts - journal articles, books, reports, theses and student papers.

**Clarity**

The essence of good writing is the skill of presenting complex ideas as simply and clearly as possible. Your guiding principle should be *'Write to express, not to impress'.*

* Avoid using long, abstract words when short, concrete ones would more clearly express your point.
* Use mostly active verbs.
* Vary sentence structure. Avoid a series of short, choppy sentences; similarly, avoid a string of long, complex sentences.
* Eliminate all redundant material.

**Tone**

This deals with the relationship between the writer and the reader as well as between the writer and the subject. Academic writing is formal, impersonal and tentative in tone.

**Formal**

In order to produce the appropriately formal academic tone you should:

* avoid slang and casual language
* avoid abbreviations and contractions.

**Impersonal**

In many subject areas you are expected to avoid the pronoun 'I'. At the same time, however, you are often asked to make judgements and include your own views on an issue. How can you do this without saying 'I think', 'I believe' and the like?

In fact, whatever is included in your paper that is not attributed to someone else is assumed to be yours. Therefore, if you say *There is a case for stricter government control on guns*, the fact that you are not reporting another person's view implies that it is your own.

**Tentative**

Very little in the world is clearly either right or wrong, all or nothing. Most research findings and theories are open to modification. Therefore academics and researchers are cautious in the way they present their findings. You too should use this style in your papers. You can do this through use of:

* verbs - may, can, seem, suggest, tend to
* adverbs - probably, likely
* adjectives - some, most, many, few
* nouns - tendency, probability, possibility, assumption, estimate

For example: Experience **suggests** that **most** students who study consistently through the trimester **tend** to achieve better marks.

**Proofreading**

Only after carefully editing for structure and style should you begin reading through your assignment to find and correct errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling. This is known as proofreading. Although it is common for students to proofread their writing in the process of composing, it is important to leave it until after all the drafting and re-drafting has been completed.

At the composing stage you should be working at the level of ideas - organising vast amounts of information and concepts gathered through your reading and reflection on the topic. Proofreading at the same time as composing can easily paralyse your writing by hindering the flow of your thought.

Writers should leave themselves plenty of time for careful proofreading to find and correct errors. Most know from unfortunate experience that it is hard to proofread well at 4 am on the day the assignment is due.

**Tips for proofreading**

* Leave some time between making your last revisions and proofreading the final draft. Put the paper away for a few hours, or better yet overnight, and proofread when your mind is fresh. This helps you see more objectively what you have written, as opposed to what you intended to write.
* Proofread backwards. Read each sentence in the paper starting with the last sentence and working backwards to the first. This isolates each sentence and helps you to more easily find errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
* Read the paper out loud, slowly. Since people are usually much more fluent at speaking than writing, writers can use their verbal expertise in their proofreading. Reading out loud will enable you to hear awkwardness and mistakes in your writing that you might not notice in reading.
* Proofread for typical errors. Review lecturers' comments on past assignments to identify errors that you make repeatedly.
* Read slowly and carefully - do not just skim. You may have accidentally left out a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire page. Occasionally pages get put in the wrong order. Spell checkers or other computer programs will not catch these errors; a very tired or rushed student may not either. Be sure to read through the final hard copy of the paper, exactly as it is to be submitted.